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RESEARCH PARTNERS-TMI AND THE DIVISION OF PERCEPTUAL STUDIES

Over the past year, The Monroe Institute® Research Division has joined forces with the Division of Perceptual Studies (DOPS), a unit of the Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences at the University of Virginia. Founded in 1967 by Dr. Ian Stevenson, DOPS focuses its research on the scientific investigation of paranormal phenomena such as various types of extrasensory perception, apparitions and deathbed visions, poltergeists, near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, and claimed memories of previous lives. As part of this larger project, DOPS has recently established a state-of-the-art EEG research facility under the direction of Edward F. Kelly, PhD, and Ross Dunseath, PhD, who are actively searching for individuals who can voluntarily enter altered states of consciousness (such as out-of-body or deep meditative states) and/or who can perform unusually well in controlled psi tasks.

Hillary Webb, PhD, TMI's director of research, recently spoke with Drs. Kelly and Dunseath about their research, their philosophy regarding how altered states and psi abilities intersect, and their impressions of the role that The Monroe Institute is currently playing within this exciting field of discovery. Dr. Dunseath, who recently attended his first TMI program, also discusses his experience as a GATEWAY VOYAGE® participant.

Hillary Webb: To start, let's talk about what you do here at DOPS and the kind of research you are involved in.

Ed Kelly: We are interested in psi and altered states of consciousness and also the physiological accompaniments of those things. Here at DOPS, we've created a laboratory that allows us to measure physiology—particularly EEG, but also fMRI. We're interested in combining [those physiological measuring techniques] with people who have unusual skills. We have no interest in just proving that psi exists for the thousandth time. We're interested in learning things about the conditions that allow psi and unusual states to occur. So, for our research, we're looking for people who have psi skills and who can do controlled experimental

tasks. We have several large families of these [experimental tasks] ready to go, and we're prepared to invent new ones to accommodate people who come to us with skills already developed. We are looking for good meditators, people who can leave their bodies voluntarily and go to a pre-agreed place, trance mediums, people who are having what might be called kundalini experiences—things of that sort. We [are working with] a guy who began spontaneously having such experiences, and we've already seen some evidence of localized [brain] activation in a place that is consistent with existing imaging and EEG studies of advanced Buddhist meditators. So there's an interesting convergence there. We're also interested in things like extreme hypnotizability.

HW: You said before that you aren't interested in proving that psi exists for the thousandth time. So you feel that at this point it has been determined that psi events exist?

EK: Absolutely.

HW: All types of psi events?

EK: Yeah, I think so. The only one I have some lingering doubts about is precognition. There's a long story to be told about that, but the most basic question is, "To what extent might apparent precognition be explained by psychokinesis (PK)?" Some people like Steve Braude and most quantum physicists interested in the field don't think true precognition is possible because the future is not yet fixed. Even F. W. H. Myers back in 1895 was very interested in this question and looked for spontaneous cases in which someone had had a vivid precognition of something that was unfolding before him and could intervene in such a way as to change the outcome. He did find cases of that sort, which suggests that free will is possible and that we don't live in a block universe.

HW: The obvious question then is, if psi has been proven thousands of times, why is there still so much resistance to it within the scientific community?

EK: I think it comes down to the fact that psi phenomena seem to conflict with most people's picture of the world. Most scientists—psychologists in particular—live in a world of nineteenth-century physics where things of this sort can't happen. The fact that they do happen is very disturbing to them and they would like to just get rid of these phenomena, as if they are the only defect in an

otherwise ever-advancing picture of things. As you know, our book [Irreducible Mind] was intended to disabuse people of the idea that the brain creates everything in our minds and consciousness in some mechanistic way. [According to that viewpoint] psi can't occur. But psi is only the tip of the spear in that regard. There are lots of other things that point in the same direction. . . . What we try to inject into the situation is the realization that there are lots of empirical things that the conventional model [of consciousness] either doesn't explain or deals with poorly. Things like extreme psychophysiological influence, exemplified by phenomena such as stigmata and hypnotically induced blisters. Memory is still a mystery, despite a lot of claims to the contrary. Multiple personality and things of that sort. Secondary consciousness. Near-death experiences, especially those occurring under conditions such as deep general anesthesia and cardiac arrest. Genius and mystical experience. All of these [phenomena] are beyond the edges of the contemporary mainstream view of things.

HW: You once made the observation that “you know you’re onto something when the skeptics say you are lying.”

EK: That [statement] goes back to the very first meeting of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882. The president, Henry Sidgwick, said, “Our job is to push them to the point where they accuse us of cheating!” Because at that point [the skeptics] have nothing left to say. And of course they got to that point. Routinely.

HW: I love the idea that at this point it is not so much a question of proving if psi events occur, but now it’s a question of looking at the individual psi events and proving that each is its own category, rather than another type of psi event.

EK: Probably the word “prove” shouldn’t be used here. Science isn’t like mathematics. It’s just that evidence accumulates either in favor of or against different hypotheses. In all these cases it’s a matter of piling up more evidence collected under better conditions with more controls and documentation and that sort of thing. We think the evidence is overwhelming that psi phenomena occur, but there are a couple of places where this issue really comes into play in contemporary research. One is over the question of survival. For example, [with mediumship] if a personality appears and it seems to be Uncle Joe—knows a whole lot of experiences that you shared with him and talks with similar

vocabulary and mannerisms and so forth and so on—the question becomes, “Is that really Uncle Joe, or has the medium been [psychically] getting all this information from you or from documents of various sorts scattered all over the planet, and somehow manufactured Uncle Joe’s personality on the spot?” There is evidence that stuff like that can happen. That’s the “super psi” versus “survival” question. Another example that is more germane to us in the lab is the question of “experimenter psi.” The fact that you call one person “the experimenter” and another person “the subject” doesn’t mean that that’s how it really works. We know that a lot of really successful psi experimenters are also very good psi subjects, so it’s quite conceivable that the experimenter’s psi [abilities] can enter into the outcomes of experiments in insidious ways that make it harder to progress experimentally. Once you allow [for the reality of] psi, as an experimenter it kind of intrudes into your life in multiple ways. One way to get around it—one of the few good ways to get around it—is to have really good subjects studied by experimenters who aren’t terribly good subjects themselves. I’m happy to report that, as far as we know, we’re pretty lousy psi subjects!

HW: I know that when I’m talking about these kinds of things, explaining them to myself or others, I end up going through all these mental gymnastics trying to figure out or explain how this all “works” on a theoretical, philosophical level. For example, is remote viewing really a state in which you are sending a portion of your consciousness outward in some fashion, while an out-of-body experience is a total release of consciousness? How much of that kind of philosophical mind bending do you have to do as you are doing these experiments?

EK: That’s a real tough one. Because really all we have are psi phenomena themselves. Interpretations are extremely difficult. Nobody has a decent theory of psi. In fact, in my opinion, that’s the one thing that would change the whole situation more quickly than anything else. More than any number of terrific experiments published in mainstream journals, [we need] a theory that doesn’t contradict what we know about the world but adds something to our understanding that allows us to explain these things as well. We just don’t have that. For example, in the case of out-of-body experience, it’s not clear that anything leaves the body at all. It is possible to think about it in other ways. Maybe psi information somehow comes in and then you have an experience of going to the place but you haven’t actually been there.

How can you get around that? Well, there are some cases that suggest that something really has gone somewhere. For example, there are what are called “collective cases” in which an apparition shows up and is witnessed by several people at the same place, often with appropriate changes of perspective. Like one guy sees [the apparition] from the front and another sees it in a mirror, another from a place across the room, and so on, and their descriptions are sort of coordinated in the proper way as if there actually were something there. But is it a physical something? Well, not in the usual sense because it doesn’t leave footprints and can’t be photographed as far as we know. So what is it? It’s something that’s sort of physical but not really. There are other cases in which people have decided to project [themselves] to some remote place and have been seen there and experienced themselves as being in the place where the other people saw them. Those are called “reciprocal collective cases.” There are maybe thirty or forty of those cases [reported] in the literature. They do suggest that something is going someplace. But is it a place in this world? There are people who think that you aren’t literally traveling to some remote place in this world, but instead to some other world that is kind of a copy of this world but exists in some other higher dimension or something of that sort.

HW: What’s your personal take on that kind of thing? Postmortem survival, for example, and your overall theory of what “consciousness” is or what it might be?

EK: I personally am somewhat convinced that survival is a reality. Other people looking at the same evidence may not be convinced. Other people are absolutely convinced, even more than I am. But in my view we have only the barest [understanding]. For example, we don’t know if everyone survives or for how long or under what circumstances. Is reincarnation a reality? I’m inclined to think that if it happens to anybody then it probably happens to most or all of us, but we don’t really know that. . . . Our book, *Irreducible Mind*, establishes—to my satisfaction, anyhow—that the theory of personality that was developed by [F. W. H.] Myers and [William] James is broadly correct. That doesn’t mean that it’s a finished thing, but the basic picture is that our everyday consciousness—[that is,] how we are when we are awake—is only a fragment of a much larger structure of mind or personality, most of which is inaccessible to us under ordinary conditions. Behind the scenes, so to speak, there’s this larger conscious something that is associated with our organism and that has means of access to

the world that are different from the ones we use to access our immediate surroundings—[something] that may have greater creative capacities, mystical capacities, and other things that most of us don't ordinarily encounter. We have lots of evidence about people who get into states where they experience themselves expanding in these directions; where there is a big influx of psi phenomena; where they find themselves out of their bodies and traveling somewhere or encountering spirits in some mystical realm—the “all-encompassing benign presence” and that sort of thing. Somehow we have to develop an expanded scientific worldview that accommodates these things. And we've got to figure out better ways of allowing people to experience them.

This is where we think technology has a huge role to play. Think of the brain as being a kind of a reducing valve or filter that causes this larger mind to take on the mini-mind character of our everyday experience. [In that case] it ought to be possible to figure out ways of jiggering that thing around to allow you to get into these expanded spaces. I think The Monroe Institute has developed a set of ways of pushing people in those directions, or nudging them, or pulling them, but I don't think that there is any reason to believe that anyone has cornered the market on how to do this, and, in fact, one of the interesting things is that there appear to be an enormous variety of circumstances that cause these openings. That's one of the things that I think points toward the correctness of this idea of the filter—that basically [consciousness] is set to operate in certain ways, and if you can bang the filter from different angles you can cause it to go out of business and let these larger things flood in.

There are lots of possibilities. Ross has a lot of experience with neurofeedback of various kinds, some of which are very effective, and we've got a slew of new ideas about ways of encouraging that to happen. And we can learn. For example, we can learn from meditators. There's a lot of history there. When people first learned about the alpha [brain-wave] rhythm and all that, there was a lot of excitement about how lots of alpha is what goes on when people are meditating ... but then it kind of petered out. The reason is, I think, that we hadn't really learned much at all about what these high meditative states look like physiologically. It was premature. ... But if we can study people and find out what's really going on, what's really unique to these states, then we can develop new kinds of feedback devices that really target those more complicated states.

Hillary Webb: Ross, you recently attended your first TMI program. What was your experience like?

Ross Dunseath: As Ed mentioned, I came into this [field] through neurofeedback and biofeedback. That's been my focus for years. I thought the binaural-beat technology used at TMI was an interesting approach to shifting states of consciousness systematically and then identifying those particular states. Although I'm not at all sure that it was actually pushing me into those states or if it was just a cue to get in there, I did notice on a repeatable basis [experiencing] consistent aspects of those states. For example, the Focus 12 state of expanded awareness: [each time] I would have the same type of experience going into that. So it felt like the technology was definitely at least inspiring me to get into those states.

My experience at TMI was quite similar to what Ed is describing in terms of this “filter model” of consciousness. It did seem like the filter was getting either adjusted, or changed, or shunted aside, and I was able to experience these other states of awareness. And they seemed to be fairly objective to me. Certainly there was a subjective quality to it, but, for example, doing the out-of-body exercise, I had the experience of shifting, sliding out, and going to other places in the building that I didn't recognize, and then later on, after the fact, as I was walking up the stairs in the [Nancy Penn Center] tower, I realized that the design of those stairs with the strips on them was what I had been looking at in the out-of-body experience. That seemed to be an objective verification of an expanded awareness. Another similar experience was in the Focus 21 state when I met up with a person who was recently deceased. A few days later somebody pulled out a picture of this person [whose characteristics] pretty much matched [the person I had seen in Focus 21]. So again, it was a kind of objective verification.

In general, using technology to try to induce these states, adjust the filter, modify it, allow an expansion of consciousness—that's the sort of thing I'm interested in doing.

HW: So your TMI experience met your expectations, if you had any?

RD: I approached it with an open mind. I was very pleasantly surprised, actually. I really enjoyed it. And I had some very meaningful experiences. Again, Ed was

talking about parts of our consciousness that we are not aware of, that are rather large. I was receiving personal information in some of these exercises that just blew me away. We also witnessed a pretty spectacular case of telepathy during the week between two [GATEWAY participants] who were really talented explorers. We would like to get connected with people like that who demonstrate great capabilities on a reproducible basis.

EK: TMI is already in the practical business of doing things that are of great interest to us. That is, altering people's states of consciousness in ways that are good for them. In ways that enlarge them, push them out toward mystical experiences, and that sort of thing. I personally think that the reconciliation of science and spirituality is the primary task of the present century, and that the scientific study of mystical experience is a high priority. TMI is already operating in that area. We're hoping to find research collaborators through TMI, and also to help you with some of the things that you're trying to do. It seems to me that it is a win-win situation.

HW: In your experience, what makes for a good research participant?

EK: Having relevant types of skills and not being too egoistically attached to them.

RD: Somebody who is not a technophobe, who doesn't mind having a cap with 128 electrodes on their head. And who can be pretty good about reproducing the phenomena under these controlled, artificial conditions.

EK: We try to get away from this traditional hierarchical research situation in which the experimenters are up here and the subject is just another piece of apparatus. It's not like that. The people with the skills are the most important part of the whole setup. We're just providing some technical resources to help them and us learn something new about what they do. Whatever it is. It might then turn into something useful for other people and that would help [other researchers] move into similar directions. To me, that's the real payoff—finding ways of promoting these skills in other people. Making them more widely available. A good example would be somebody who can reliably produce psychokinesis. To work with somebody like that would help us figure out optimal PK detectors and understand more about what's going on with PK.

HW: Final question: Of all the subjects to study, why this one? What is it about this field that most excites you both?

EK: Well, for myself, it's not only that it is a leading-edge science, but that it's leading-edge science of a uniquely humanly relevant sort—[relevant] to our deepest needs and capacities. I see it as our main hope for the future. Either we're going to annihilate ourselves or we're going to move in a positive direction.

RD: I couldn't have said it any better.

HW: Me neither. Thanks, guys.

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